Decaying From Within

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Decaying From Within

by MintyEcco

Summary

Blood isn't exactly something that gets a rise out of Will Graham anymore; but it's the only excuse he can make as he starts suddenly gagging in the woods near the scene of the latest 'Tooth Fairy' killing, because he's unable to let Jack know that really he's gagging on a mushroom caught in his throat. And this is an experience he's been struggling with for sometime.

Retching Roots

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The smell of rot and decay mix with the freshy rained on earth. Swirling around in the air until you can't tell if what you're smelling is one with the words or the permeating stink of old blood.

It doesn't matter much to Will right now though.

He can't be bothered telling one from the other as his own blood slides down his chin.

Finding himself doubled over in the dirt he gags and gags at something caught in his throat that he just can't seem to get out.

However, it definitely wasn't a good look to be stuck practically face first in the dirt in the middle of the forest near the most recent Tooth Fairy case. Especially since he was just returning back to the field after three years of peaceful bliss.

But with all that accounted for the part he was taking the most issue with now, was that his 'condition' was getting worse.

He'd been struggling with it for a few years now.

Ever since he and Molly decided to tie the knot he'd find himself struggling with horrible coughing fits.

Violent saliva filled coughing fits that would leave him feeling like he was being choked as he was doubled over the bathroom toilet. Molly nervously patting him on the back while offering him brief sips of water and saltines to try and alleviate *whatever* he's going through.

Whispering into his ear that he should "See a doctor" or "Go to the ER." Anything to stop the bloodied coughs that seem to follow her new husband everywhere they went.

There would be times when it would get better, but it always came back to those ragged coughs.

And no matter how hard Molly pushed he would always brush her advice aside.

Doctors would be too difficult of a topic to broach now.

Too many professionals in various fields have betrayed him in someway for him to even begin to feel remotely comfortable around them.

Besides, what Molly saw wasn't a whole picture.

He'd been able to keep the worst of it from her prying eyes, and for that now he had hell to pay.

"And here I thought you'd still be used to the sight of blood." Jack chides dryly from behind him.

"Things have– changed." He gets out before gagging again.

Jack stands there watching this out of character display from Will.

He'd seen some of the most grotesque disturbing creations the disturbed had to provide. Towers looming down on cloudy beaches as the decaying smell of rot spills all around, the half consumed bodies littered with living breathing mushrooms that had set up roots while the people were most likely still alive, or the flayed flesh as humans were hung by wires int eh facsimile of the beauty of angels.

However the most apt for the both of them were be the blood bath that was Hannibal Lecter's house. The agony they had both experienced and those around them had experienced as they were all gutted both physically and emotionally.

So much gore had been witnessed by those soft brown eyes, yet he was gagging at barely the most disturbing display on their list.

It was– off putting.

With a heavy sigh Jack states, "I'll give you five more minutes, but then I'm calling you an ambulance."

Will briefly lets out a surprised chuckle at that before going back to hacking and coughing. He gives Jack a quick thumbs up before shooing him away.

Leaving slowly his eyes linger on Will longer than either of them wanted, only turning away when an agent approached him.

Will eyes glance up to watch him go before looking back down at the dirt and, giving it his all, he retches up a blood covered piece of fungi.

At least at first he thought it was a piece.

Moving closer, however, it became clear that rather than a fraction it was a *whole* mushroom.

His blood runs cold as he nervously picks it up.

Any entirely intact mushroom drenched in his own blood. Bits of flesh hanging off the edges as Will feels his breath pick up.

Panic.

He was panicking now.

This had *clearly* gotten out of control.

Yet rather than do anything he tosses it aside and goes back to work.

There's a time and a place to panic about such topics.

Research will have to be done at a later date.

Any articles discussing any pre-existing president for a condition like this.

Any previous cases.

And if any one– survived.

“Feeling better?” Jack half-heartedly asks as Will thoughtlessly returns to his side.

Will dully nods, whipping his chin subconsciously as he can still feel the blood trickling down on it. Yet when he glances at his hands he finds that there is nothing there. It was all just tricks his mind were beginning to play on him as his gut withers in agony at the new found latent fear that he was having to shove it all down.

Jack studies him as all these thoughts rush in and out of his head.

His breath shaking as he tries to regain control enough to begin the dissection that was laid out in front of him. Because he was here for a reason.

A job.

The only way out of this was it get that done.

Then he could hide away.
Building walls of books that might hold the key to the cure of the roots that had set themselves up inside of him.

Or to eliminate what rotted fate he was now damned to play out.

Jack, not being able to catch any of this horrific thought, reassuringly pats him on the shoulder and gives him a little shake, “Alright, get back to it then. I doubt any of us want to be stuck here much longer than necessary.”

Again nodding his head Will ambles forward towards the carcasses.

But the Tooth Fairy is beyond him now.

All that is left in his head is the desperate clawing fear at the apparent decay of his insides.

Leaving him wondering, what will be left of him now?

Chapter End Notes

Blood and love go hand in hand with these two, as it does too for hanahaki disease in my mind.
I've done this trope before for Re-Animator's top ship Danbert once before, but I think it makes just as much sense to bring it to this fandom as well.

Cross Breeding

Swallowing a cough Will makes his way through the hallowed halls that he had once been forced to call home, and was not particularly keen on ever returning to for any reason.

Chilton had made appeals to him to come and visit the made Doctor now housed in his place, possible getting further information out of him about his mental state or reasoning for his killings, but was always met with the same resounding no.

The very idea of returning to this institution felt– wrong. Even if it wasn't marred by the soon to be fulfilled promise about who he would be laying his eyes on again for the first time in three years.

Picture had done him justice enough that Will far preferred being forced to look at them at ever news stand he passed by than getting the chance to see him again in the flesh.

It just– worked better this way.

Hannibal had chosen this for himself as a means to get back at Will for what Freddie dubbed his 'rejection' based on what little she could gleen of their relationship.

Which was sorely misrepresented of the reality, at least that's what Chilton stuck with in all his press related to Hannibal the Cannibal.

Will had grown to have far more ambivalent feels about the matter in the years since. Especially since his mind had opted instead to split itself between his new found family and his uncomfortably pressing condition.

The two went hand in hand well enough though he certain made the poor choice in focusing on one over the other since the latter happened to continually progressing forward into more obvious forms.

Such as how he can't stop himself from going over to the wall to lean on it and hack up nothing. Leading Alana, who had been accompanying him due to regulation and personal interset, to side eye him harder than she already had been through this whole procedure.

Their relationship seemingly having frayed beyond anything understandable since they escaped Verger mansion.

Though he did happen to be a groomsman at her and Margot's wedding, at Margot's request. It was certainly odd knowing that he'd very nearly, and properly in one case, had an intimate relationship with both women. However, it was better they find happiness with one another than continue to suffer in such a world that had been nothing but cruel to them. His eyes couldn't help but hover over Alana's stomach as he knew exactly *how* she had come to possess the child that was the key to her and Margot's union now.

A minor detail in the grander picture of their relationship though, and made perfect sense for both of the tactile women if you knew them well enough.

“Are you alright, Will? Do I need to tell Jack that we need to reschedule for another day?” While her questions could come off to an outsider as caring Will knew that she was only bothering to ask out of obligation. This was just another bum in the road for her, and she had gotten used to deal with those by now.

“No, Alana, I’m fine. Let’s just,” Standing straight up he flicks a drop of blood off of his lip and turns back to her, “Get this over with.”

Recoiling back into her cold position she replies with a simple, “I couldn’t agree more.” Before swiftly striding forward to the doors and unlocking them for Will’s arrival.

They swing open with only the utmost grandeur of a being of such renowned as the Chesapeake Ripper.

A creature beyond human comprehension his eyes are already locked onto Will as he steps forward into the room, piercing through him with such steady precision it was as if a predator had just been presented with the chance to catch prey after starving them for weeks on end.

He had waited for this moment with baited breath, and now this whole conceit was going to fruition.

Though with many caveats with it.

Such as this pesky glass wall keeping him from being able to feel Will Graham’s flesh against his own once more.

The idea of such a sensation running a chill through his spine as he steps as close as he can to the glass and cocks his head to one side, “To what do I owe the pleasure, Will? I was beginning to lose hope that we would ever meet again.”

“Oh you know very well that’s not true, if you’ve made sure of nothing else it’s that we’d be able to meet again.”

Offering him a toothless smile for his attempt at cutting remarks Hannibal nods his head in agreement. “I suppose you’re correct there. Though being forced to suffer under Dr. Chilton’s watchful eye is less than ideal, I make due with what I can.”

A grunt from Alana stops them both in their tracks, her eyes watching Hannibal nearly as intently as he had watched Will.

Awkwardly clearing his throat Will requests, “Can we be– alone?”

She moves her head to him and offers back the same look just with extra anger added now.

“You should know better than anyone nothing will happen now, Alana.” Letting out a heavy sigh he swiftly adds, “If he tries anything I’ll call for you.”

“He’s always trying something, Will, you should know that better than anyone by now.”

“And I could say the same to you, yet you’re the one at his beck and call.”

The words are sharp and elicit a darker glare from Alana, before she moves back behind the door. Stating coldly as she leaves, “Don’t let him in your head.”

And then they are alone, an odd sensation to be sure as years of separation have now set them down two strikingly different paths with no clear way back.

Though they both know that this is not entirely accurate.

A string still binds the two together, however it is nearly frayed into oblivion. But it still pulls them together. Tugging in its own small way until they were able to finally be reunited.

But it’s still from behind a wall bound eyes. Ever present and ever watching, even if the physical form of them is gone.

“I am assuming you didn’t wait this long for a pleasant check in on how I’m faring through all of this?” Hannibal questions, his voice oozing down into Will with a soothing smoothness he hadn’t heard in years. The seeming monstrous edge that his words had previously carried, now far gone and replaced with a seeming saranide. But it only echos out through the glass, losing the weight that had been intended by it.

“I don’t know how much you’re aware of from behind these porcile walls, but a lot of your press has turned tail and found a new monster to gawk at.” He begins, trying to grab control of the conversation and force in a productive direction. A tickle in the back of his throat telling him that he needed to get this over with quick, less he give this cannibal another key over him.

“Yes, Dr. Chilton was very keen on making me aware of this fact. Something about if I would provide him with further insight then I could ‘regain my limelight.’ Though that has little appeal to me now.”

“Attention has no appeal to *you*? The Chesapeake Ripper who once put a councilman in a tree and for six years for flowers to take root inside of him; only to set him in a parking lot for all the world to see, and now sees little appeal in attention? Pardon me but I find that hard to believe.”

Hannibal gives him a thin lipped small, because he knows that Will can see right through him and any refrains he may offer will only fall on his deaf ears now. He had a job to do, and that was the only reason he was here now.

“Believe me or don’t believe me, that is for you to decide, but you are here for one reason and one reason alone. So, tell me about this ‘Tooth Fairy’ and how he seems to be running circles around Jack Crawford.”

Letting out a sigh of relief Will opens his mouth to begin sharing the evidence at hand, but instead he finds that tickle has now become a full blown burning within his diaphragm. An

all consuming fire that was alight inside of him and he can't keep the smoke in anymore. It's all stuck there in his throat, choking him out from the inside out, and he scrambles away from Hannibal before he can see anymore than the horror stricken look that appeared on his face at the realization.

Clamping a hand over his mouth he begins hacking and coughing once more. Crumpling up, trying to shield himself from Hannibal's studying eye, as he feels what little breath that could pierce through the cracks be forced out of him. Suffocation feeling the gaps left behind by it until all he can do is gag and pray that it will move out with the pushing of his throat.

It was big, he could tell that much, but Hannibal didn't have the full picture here.

All he had was the terror of a man who seldom showed such strong emotions, and then the immediate crumpling of any semblance of power he had in this room.

Within the span of barely a minute Will had gone from having all the cards in his hand to none at all. And that was more terrified to the Ripper than any hollow threats Alana or Chilton could make about taking away his privileges.

"Will?" It comes out smaller than he would have expected from the Doctor but he barely has time to process it before he is put back onto the ground with another wave of gagging.

"Will, are you alright Will?" Hannibal tries to enquire, but all he is met with are the same hollow refrain of the human body rejecting something within his former accomplice. Concern becomes more and more present in his demeanor as he places both of his hands on the wall and tries to peer over at Will to see what is happening.

It's not enough though.

He can't see anything, all he can do is hear it. Hear how he gasps for breath before coughing and retching once more once he gets that very air inside of him.

It was mortifying.

He was so close to Will Graham, closer than he had ever been in years, yet he was unable to do anything but stare on as he seemingly died before his very eyes.

"**Will**!" He says again, this time raising his voice and banging his hand flat against the glass.

He wasn't supposed to do that.

He was going to get in trouble for that, if Alana found out.

But that didn't matter right now.

Will was all that mattered in that moment.

Consequences be damned.

However, Will can't hear him over the ringing in his ears.

This one was *really* stuck.

So stuck in fact that it dawned on him that if he wanted to make it out of this without being carted away on a stretcher he was going to have to go beyond just gagging. He couldn't trust his muscles to get the job done now.

He needed to take care of this himself.

Mentally gritting his teeth he lifts his hand up and forces it down his throat. Halting the cough that he was currently dealing with instantaneously morphs into a gag, but he ignores it. Feeling the lining of his throat if his body could experience any more sensations he would have shivered, but it was already overloaded with all that was happening.

His fingers brush against the top of what was caught in his throat and promptly digging his nails in deep he pulls it forward with a harsh yank taking it most of the way up.

Now being able to feel it with the tip of his tongue, and taste the strong tang of blood and bile, he gives it one last pull.

And he can suddenly breathe again.

His airway is clear once more and he relishes it with a deep breath.

But his eyes are far more focused on what now lies in his hand.

As while he already expected a rather large mushroom he did not anticipate seeing small spirling roots coming off of it, with flower buds attached on top of it.

This didn't make *any* sense now.

This hadn't made sense from the start but this broke every rule that had seemingly been established by this affliction. Because for all intensive purposes flowers and mushrooms did not mix unless the flower had withered up and was being feasted upon by said mushrooms.

Yet they were seemingly growing off of the roots of the pre-established mushrooms.

Moving it around he also notices why he was tasting blood in his mouth. The lining of his throat had seemingly been torn and parts of it were hanging off the mushroom. The buds in particular hanging down towards the ground from the weight of the flesh placed upon them.

It was all too much.

His breath hitches as he begins to imagine the horrors that were going on in his insides.

Mushrooms inexplicably morphing into flora before getting caught on flesh and ripping him to shreds.

How.

How the hell was this happening?

Why was this happening?

“Will?” Hannibal says again, making him whirl around in surprise.

He’d completely forgotten where he was, but he’d also forgotten what he was holding.

As now Hannibal’s eyes were drawn to the very same display in this palm.

Freezing in place as Hannibal looks it over he waits for what Ripper to speak his mind on the issue.

This had been so thoroughly derailed that the mere thought of the ‘Tooth Fairy’ no longer fit into the equation. The one reason he’d even bothered to show up here and it was no longer important compared to what was happening now.

“Leave, Will.” He suddenly says, “Say that I have requested documents about the ‘Tooth Fairy’ and Chilton will be obliged to do as he’s told. We can reconvene at a later date, and then we can move forward with your investigation.”

Will blinks at him in befuddlement, horsley trying to say, “But we’re–”

“You need rest, Will. We cannot carry on any discussion now that this has transpired. You are far too worn out to adequately provide me with what I need to begin approaching this issue, and for my peace of mind I would rather not going into frivolous discussions after such a display.”

“This is not friv–”

“Get some rest, Will.” Hannibal practically commands, halting any of Will’s protests with gritted teeth and frustrations.

He’d messed this up.

He was supposed to get information for Jack and he hadn’t even gotten a shred of this.

Opening his mouth to speak again he meets Hannibal’s eyes and realizes it will continue to be fruitless no matter what.

Hannibal would not hear anything from him until he deemed him well rested enough to even stand in front of him.

Shoving the fungi in his coat pocket he lets out a frustrated sigh as he approaches the door. Just as he begins to open it Hannibal calls out, “I would also recommend seeing a Doctor about this. And if you do not feel comfortable doing that the internet is a wonderful place from what I understand.”

Shooting him his nastiest glare Will grumbles to himself before storming off.

Door slamming behind him but still being able to feel the cannibal's eyes boring into him.

He didn’t need his concern.

He didn’t *want* his concern.

But he was going to get it nonetheless.

And he couldn’t be more thrilled about it.

Reflection In Blood

Luckily he'd largely gotten off scot free, at least when it came to Jack and Alana's scrutinizing eyes.

His skin crawled as they glared over him with suspicion as if by the mere act of conversing with the mad doctor he'd been compromised all over again. Already plotting out his inevitable escape that he'd heard was always being promised to those that dared cross him.

Alana especially had everything to lose if he did escape, so she was particularly skeptical of the answers he was giving.

To her something just wasn't adding up between what he was saying and how long he'd been in there for.

Hours had been spent when it was just Hannibal and Will at therapy sessions. Toiling away on cases or Will's mental health, but they never ended so quickly.

However, this was easy enough to mask up with the thin veil of, "He brought Molly up" setting enough of a standard for his sudden departure that Jack implored Alana to calm down.

It was understandable, after all, that Hannibal would go for such an easy target to get a rise out of Will.

"He was just being sensible."

"And compromising the information he could have gotten? That doesn't sound like the Will I remember." Alana harshly retorts, her eyes narrowing again in distrustful suspicion.

"Well a lot has changed since we last saw the Will you knew." Jack's side eye makes Will's skin crawl as he can only assume the images of him running off as the sight of a gruesome murder to hide in the woods and vomit were the first thing to come to mind for him, "He has more to worry about than just his usual litter of dogs. He has a family to look out for, just like you, and you know how his threats toward Margot make you feel."

Alana crosses her arms and looks away from the two men. Not willing to admit that Jack was right but also not willing to drop her suspicion in regards to her former friend. Their relationship now weighed down by the heavy strain of Will allowing Hannibal Lecter to make it out of Verger mansion alive rather than let him be put down like the wild beast he is. The invite to the wedding mostly being Margot's idea since it was Will, if inadvertently, that had brought them together.

"Just because he has more to worry about doesn't mean he should compromise the one reason we even let him into that room, Jack. We all know that even if Hannibal says he'll do something doesn't mean he will."

“Then we’ll just have to make sure he makes good on his word then.” Jack coldly states, his eye briefly darting over to Alana to emphasize his point before going back to Will with concern.

It was easy enough to understand why, of course.

He was extremely pale, even for Will, and suddenly appeared so weak that a strong breeze could have easily knocked him over.

That wasn’t normal, and Jack knew as much. But he couldn’t pin down what the issue was and why Will seemed so easily shaken up.

Alana wasn’t wrong, it didn’t make sense that Will had burst out of Hannibal’s room so quickly after entering. But he’d clearly undergone some change in his time away from the FBI, yet he hadn’t heard anything about it from Molly.

If she even bothered to talk to him that is. Rather preferring to give him the general cold shoulder if they had the misfortune to run into each other at various points in the last three years.

Likewise for Alana, though Will was partially okay with that considering what ended up happening the last time the two women he’d had previous relations met.

“He will.” He offhandedly assures on impulse. Both sets of eyes immediately go over to him as his stomach drops at the seemingly implication he just gave them.

He could still feel that sense of suspicion coming off of them in regards to the odd dynamic between him and Hannibal.

“He’s already interested in the case, also any chance he can get to glean some more of the limelight isn’t unwelcome no matter what he says. The eye is what is most important when it comes to his art. When he loses that he loses himself.” He ensures to clarify.

Eyes still trained on him, but softening slightly with the more detailed picture now at their disposal. Suspicions largely dismissed and allows them to refocus on the task at hand.

A task that Will was ready to pull himself away from.

Still feeling shaky and weak, and worrying endlessly about whether or not his pocket was dripping blood with the bits of flesh tucked in his pocket, he. bites his tongue nervously as Alana and Jack’s words blur in and out in a disassociated haze. Only coming to when Jack places his arm on his shoulder reassuringly, offering that “It’s probably best if you call it a day. I’ll let you know when things start to develop again.”

With a dull nod he shuffles out of the office still in a dazed like stooper.

“Something’s off with him, Jack.” Alana finally states once the doors were good and sealed behind him.

“You don’t have to tell me twice, but he stepped back from all of this. Maybe Molly really did help him figure some things out.”

“Well whatever she did, I don’t know if it’s really helped him at all.”

Jack pauses to consider the strange and off putting behavior Will had already displayed, and the last time such a thing had happened– was Hannibal.

“I’ll keep an eye on him, Alana, if that makes you feel any better.”

“Honestly, Jack, it doesn’t.” She sighs, already being able to tell that whatever was going on with Will had been going on for far too long for any of Jack’s fruitless attempts to be able to cause any change. “Will has to go and take care of himself now. If he wants to tell us what’s happening then we’ll help how we can, but if he doesn’t that’s his choice. Nothing else to be done about it now.

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“Rough day?” Runs in and out of Will’s ear as he stumbles through his front door. Face still gaunt and clammy from the events earlier in the day, but he couldn’t go anywhere else but here now.

At least this way he’d know where everything is if he needed to– pry something else out.

“Yeah, yeah, you could say that.” He half-heartedly tries to reply, eyes not being able to focus on one particular thing in front of him he can’t find Molly anywhere in the house. Barely being able to catch the dog in front of him and stop himself from falling face first into the hard oak floors.

“Do you need to lay down?” Now comes from behind him, a hand suddenly appearing on his shoulder and making him flinch away in surprise.

A baffled and concerned Molly stares at him. Already privy to Will’s oddities this is a bit much even for him at the worst of times. “Should I call someone?”

“No, that won’t be necessarily, Molly. I’ll just go get ready for bed early.” He attempts to brush aside, moving towards where he thinks the bedroom is and not bothering to pause and consider if he was wrong. He could only handle looking like a fool for a certain amount of the day.

Molly watches him go as he bumps into the door before fumbling with the door knob and disappearing behind it. One of their various dogs whimpering behind him, she leans down and begins to pet him. Muttering down to the worried pooch, “Me too buddy. I’m worried about him too.”

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Scrambling into the bathroom he throws the mushroom down into the sink and lets the remaining blood his coat hadn’t soaked up splatter around it.

Hands gripping the edges of the sink for dear life he tries to gain some barring but is only met with a hollow ache in his chest where presumably the mushrooms were coming from.

This had gone too far.

This had *always* been going too far; he was just too afraid to admit he needed help again. Especially from a medical profession.

But what would they even have to say now?

Would they even know what was ailing him? Or would they lock him up for studying like Chilton before them?

No, too many lines of trust had been breached before; it was up to only him to figure this out.

Even if he was told otherwise, by untrust worth sources if even Hannibal thought he should see someone, it just wasn't feasible for him to reasonably go in and trust someone anymore.

He'd just have to do his own research.

His own time spent pouring over both a grotesque murder case, and how he may or may not be about to face down the barrel of an inevitable shotgun could have handled months ago.

Staring down at the gorey mess in front of him he flinches in surprise at the softest, sweetest, knock at the door he's heard in a long time.

His heart aches for a moment as he realizes just who he will be affecting by his decisions now, but nothing else can be done. There is no other option than to move forward alone through this all.

"Do you need anything, honey? I think there are some tums in one of the kitchen drawers if that's necessary."

Shoving the mushroom away again he sighs and turns on the faucet.

"No I'm alright now, just tired is all. I think I'll head to bed early if that's alright, Molly."

"Of course!" She cries from behind the door, unable to grasp the horrors going on within.

Biting his cheek with how easy that all came out he wades up his coat, protecting any sign of blood from outside eyes, and exits with a weak smile on his face.

Seeing her standing there though reminds him of something: Hannibal knows.

Hannibal Lecter knows the truth of the eldritch unknowns gutting him from the inside out.

So no matter how much he tried to convince himself he was better off suffering alone in this, he never would really be alone.

Because the Chesapeake Ripper was in on the secret with him.

And there was no way in hell that he would hesitate to ask him what he'd learned about his condition the next time he saw him.

As he husband stands in front of her, his eyes darting around the room as if processing something, she reaches out and leaves a peck on his cheek, giving him the warmest smile he'd received in awhile something inside of him stirs, though it's strangely hard to tell if it's good or not.

Still standing there in a trance as something squirms and swirls in his guts, Molly decides it's for the best to leave him there like that. Not like she was going to be able to snap him out of it clearly. He probably had gotten caught up in a new idea for Jack that had just occurred to him, she naively believes while her husband suffers in the other room from an overwhelming morbid curiosity for what was happening inside of him.

What horrors were coiling around his organs and squeezing them until he fell in a random shock on the floor?

What new monstrosity was being concocted inside of him only to eventually see the light of day when it begins the process of choking him once more?

What was going on now?

What was happening to him?

Send Me Away and Spit In My Face

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The pristine practically elegant halls now reek of lies and betrayal as Will strides down them. Faster than before and with a new found sense of rage he is accompanied by both Jack and Alana; each with very good reasons for doing so.

Hannibal had gone and done something very *naughty*.

“It’d be for the best if you don’t–”

“Show him any emotion?” Will snaps at Jack, “That’ll be the easy part in this whole charade, the hard part will be getting the information we want out of him.”

Alana’s eyes glide over to him and Jack’s face scrunches up at his harsh tone, but neither of them can dispute his point.

Hannibal Lecter had all the cards again, and he wasn’t going to be willing to play them anytime soon. Especially with the restrictions he’d been put under.

“He’ll probably want to talk alone.” Will adds as the door draws closer and closer. The wriggling around his guts begins again as his thoughts go back to being curled up on the hardwood floor in front of him. Barely being able to shield his weakness from the hungry eyes of a predator, and inevitably failing once he had to pry the suffocating piece of fungus free.

He couldn’t risk Hannibal alluding to it to Alana or Jack.

Especially with what he knows now.

“Is that really a good idea given what happened last time?” Alana questions, the three taking up a triangle position in front of the door as they now mull over Will’s sudden suggestion.

“I won’t go running away again, not now. You should know that by now Alana. Besides, I doubt either of you are interested in seeing us do our little dance until he coughs something up.”

Though the imagery was ironic to his mind for the ignorant people around him it only served to convey his conviction on the issue.

He was going ot get Hannibal to talk, come hell or high water. It was the least he could do after putting his wife and son in harms way as a means of punishing him.

Or was it liberating him?

Which distorted reality was Hannibal peering into and what was he trying to get out of it?

Entering into the killer's new stripped down domain Will quickly glances over the torn down gaudiness of it all.

Where once decadence had once been was now left barren and hollow.

Perfectly suited for the man trapped inside of it all.

Thankfully Jack and Alana appeared to oblige Will's suggestion as they made no move to enter alongside him. Rather watching him go with careful consideration, though no obvious inclination to follow suit.

They were trusting him once more with this deranged killer, but this time they knew for certain Will had more stake in forcing something out of him.

Retribution was at hand, after all, and he wasn't going to let this chance go.

"Any new information to share with me, Will?" Hannibal soothes, his voice coiling around Will's head with such sincerity it makes his skin prickle.

Where once this tone would have been employed during one of their many therapy sessions now it rings like a sickly sweet siren song trying to lure a hapless victim back.

Bristling at the sensation in turn he clears his throat, the threat of a soft tickle already quickly becoming present within his insides, he retorts, "Yes we've gleaned some more information from your little– stunt." He growls out.

Of course Hannibal couldn't be trusted to handle the simplest of requests. You were giving him too much power that way, and with power came control. And that is exactly what Hannibal wanted over other people.

Though that was difficult to achieve when you were bound and practically gagged up against a contraption that could easily move you from one place to another.

Will still had back aches from being strapped up to that thing for too long in transportation when he was under Dr. Chilton's care.

Not fun.

Now, however, it was somewhat entertaining to watch the once powerful Hannibal Lecter be chained up just as easily as he was when he'd been framed for the Ripper's murders.

The perfect sight to ease some of his anger, though only very slightly with the flames not being able to be smothered properly due to his mind continuing to go back to the fear Molly and Wally must have suffered as they had to run for their lives because of him.

It was too much.

Too far, even for Hannibal.

“I feel like anything I tell you can already be surmised by your– circumstances.” Will attempts to calmly reply, though some edge remains in his voice. Hannibal’s eyes seemingly reacting to this detail as they widen ever so slightly.

“Yes, I assume the Red Dragon failed at my request then?”

“He did. He did fail, Hannibal, though I’m sure that’s rather disappointing to you.”

“Disappointment is not the word I would use at the moment, Will.” His eyes begin their normal probing then. Studying his figure and disposition that Will can only assume he’s looking for any signs of his illness.

If only he knew that you just can’t tell from the outside.

“Then what are you feeling at the moment?”

“Concern, to be blunt.”

“For yourself? Because of how much you just fucked up?”

Smiling. He starts smiling behind that plastic mask. His eyes crinkle in such a way that Will’s stomach curls and crunches up knowing what was just out of his sight.

Disgusting.

Smiling at a time like this. Over a discussion like this.

“No, Will, I think you know quite well why I’m concerned at the moment. Did you do what I recommended.”

“I don’t feel comfortable with Doctors anymore, Hannibal. I’m sure you understand why.”

The smile fades at that remark.

Good.

“Of course, I hadn’t considered your trauma with them to be so– hindering in regards to this issue.”

“I don’t need to give them any further reasoning to lock me up and throw away the key. Chilton already proved what any psychologist would do if they got their hands on me. Who knows what a medical professional would do if they saw the state I was in.”

Silence presents itself promptly as Hannibal appears to thoughtfully be considering his next response, but Will isn’t having any of that.

“Now, how did you discover how to talk to, as you call him, the Red–”

“Have you searched the internet for answers? If you’re concerned about a professional there’s always that option instead. Though it is far less reliable from my understanding.”

Grinding his teeth together he glares at form therapist. He knows that he's right, but he hates to have to admit it now.

"Yes, I did actually. But that's not what we're discussing right now, Hannibal. We need to focus on the case at hand."

"The case I am most concerned with at the moment, Will, is your physical health. Now, I'd rather have you talk to me about what is currently ailing you. After we're done with that I will indulge your questioning."

"You'll answer all of them?" Crossing his arms he rolls his eyes, knowing that Hannibal would never go so far as to genuinely answer all of his questions. He always needs to have some control over the situation, and the only thing that gave him that at the moment was his connection with the 'Red Dragon.'

"To the best of my ability, you have my word."

Will lets out a frustrated sigh at that response. There's always caveats with this man. You're just not ever able to get the clear cut picture on anything with him.

Maybe that was the fun of it though.

But fun wasn't supposed to be apart of *this* equation.

Just facts and the necessary understanding that comes with them.

That's what Will wanted right now.

What he *needed* right now.

Because he'd just had what little trust could be placed in the flesh sake that called itself Hannibal right now. And for his kindness he'd been treed upon and violated.

"To the best of your ability? The best isn't enough here, Hannibal. Either you share the truth or–"

"Or I'm left wondering if you'll be the next one coming in this room? If I'll hear from Alana's lips how you choked on your own vomit one day and that will be all from us? Now Will, you know more than anyone how important patient confidentiality is to me."

"So he was your patient?"

"Not directly, more spiritually. My acts influence what has been born inside of him now. Making him just as much my patient as you or Margot."

"And because of that oh so important patient confidentiality–"

"I can only share my *best*, as I'm sure you can as well. Since you refuse to see a doctor about what is happening inside of you."

Eyes pierce through one another as both offer up cruel glares of frustration to one another. Both sharing in an equal angle of desperate anger and longing for the other to offer up what was being asked. Will out of obligated, and Hannibal out of genuine concern.

A concern that was going to drive him even more mad in this porcelain prison than he already was being stripped of his identity.

Will was now all that was left of that identity beyond these hollowed echoing screaming halls.

What would remain once his corpse was withering away in some oak box with a empty stone etching out what people thought he life had amounted to.

He *had* to live.

“So, Will, do you want my best, or do you want to turn back around and tell Jack and Alana again that you failed to glean any further insight into the man that nearly killed your family from the source that set him up?”

Nails digging into the palm of his hands the free hand, not focused on drawing blood, ran along his throat as he contemplated if he could talk at all. Or if he would be under threat of doubling over once more when he said his first few words.

Determining that wasn’t going to happen, yet, he clears his throat calmly attempting to regain composer before beginning the odd explanation to come.

“You want to hear me speak first, before you do, don’t you?”

“If you are at liberty to do so, Will, that would be preferable.”

Removing his excavating nails from his palms, barely leaving any damage, he runs that hand through his hair a less destructive means of comfort. And then begins to open his flesh before Hannibal’s very eyes with the mere words of explanation the darling doctor longed to have buzzing through his brain for the next few hours.

Something to grasp at and tear apart.

To plan for and understand the intricacies of the difficult situation that had slithered it’s way around both their necks.

Just enough to comprehend why this was–

“Apparently it’s some sort of folkloric disease that plagues those who are suffering from, unrequited love.”

Silence becomes suffocating as Will waits patiently for his former psychiatrist to start the dissection process that comes with that.

Folklore.

No obvious medical cases to back it just– *folklore*.

“Does one of your dogs not love you enough now, Will? Is all this suffering just a fictitious ploy to only further your need for the sympathetic eye of–”

“You are the only person that knows! How does that grant me any extra sympathy, Hannibal?” He snaps back, “Clearly you don’t have any of that left in you otherwise you wouldn’t be prodding where you shouldn’t be!”

“I have every right to be ‘prodding’ when I see one of my patients in pain.”

“But I’m not your patient anymore, Doctor Lecter, I have set myself aside from you for years before now!”

“Then why has this fallen on your shoulders, Will?”

Recoiling at the vailed accusation Will bites down on his tongue before he says anything more that could give Hannibal such a grotesque idea.

“I don’t know what your insinuating, but it has nothing to do with you.”

“Yet you have the love and admiration of a doting wife, while suffering from a disease supposedly based in unrequited love. How is that possible, Will? Do you not love your darling wife that indulges you in your habits, all except for one.”

Body shaking from anger and revolution his guts twist and squirm beneath his soft malleable flesh. Threatening to burst forward in one moment of totally rage, but breathing in deeply Will fights for what little control he still has over the meat sake he happens to be able to move around.

“I’ve given you what you wanted, Doctor. Now it’s time for you to give me what I want.”

“That’s all you know?”

“When there’s no direct medical records of such a disease and all you’ve had to read are websites referencing old text referring to gods and goddesses and the curses they inflict foolish mortals, then you try to come up with something better.”

The two stare at each other once more. Hannibal patiently waiting for Will to illuminating him on his next course of action, and Will waiting for the Ripper to divulge those oh so important details that he needs to get before he can turn tail and run back to Alana and Jack. Neither satisfied until the other does exactly as they want.

Yet the usually strong willed Hannibal is the first to concede, “Just, take steps to relieve the pain Will.”

Blinking at him in surprise he slowly nods his head, “Then you’re ready to talk?”

“If you promise to relieve yourself of the pain you seem unable to stop inflicting upon yourself. Some over the counter medication will surely work for you.”

Betraying himself and smiling ever so slightly Will nods again. “That can easily be taken care of if that is your diagnosis, Doctor.”

“It is, and I am imploring you to do it.”

Trying to brush this conversation aside he gives Hannibal exactly what he wants to hear despite his trepidation to listen to the cannibalistic doctor and the diagnosis he may hand out, “I will, now are you ready to give me what I want?”

Breathing in deeply Hannibal nods his head, ready to give his interrogator all that he can reasonably provide about the elusive and dangerous Red Dragon. “Ask the questions and I will reply.”

Satisfied by that response Will begins to go over the basics that Jack particularly wanted cleared up.

Though with each word his throat aches more and more, and he knows full well there while the Red Dragon is the purpose behind this visit the answers he would receive were not going to be the ones he truly needed from it.

Rather something more was going to be gleaned here. Something more palpable and real than he'd ever felt holding Molly close.

Because from elusions and fears reality was creeping back in.

Time was ticking down now with each misstep he seemed to take.

And that reality was not going to be accepted by all those that were going to have to face it.

Chapter End Notes

I feel it fitting going forward to change the rating now.
I've always had a hard time telling if my descriptions are grotesque enough to warrant an Mature rating, but the time has come for the final stages of infection. So a change is needed in turn, I suppose.

A Roaring Beast or A Weeping Face

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal was right, Will did need to start taking pain meds.

It was all becoming too much to cope with now.

He barely kept it together as is as he walked away from the Ripper and into the waiting arms of the FBI. The ones he'd turned on Hannibal for, but yet had also turned on him before. Nearly as twisted a relationship as his and his former psychiatrist appeared to have. Just tinted with a soft shade of reds and pinks to make the world feel like a better place.

But that red was beginning to run and bleed into something more grim.

Dark hues spilling out and into this rosie world he'd tried to build for himself, and each and every time he tried to deny it his guts reminded him of his folly.

How foolish he really was for thinking he could step away from the longings and desires that Doctor Lecter had built within him.

No, not built, that he'd revealed inside of him.

Now it was there.

Waiting patiently for it's time to shine once more.

Continuously being denied and ignored as he played pretend with this mock family he'd formed in the image of what he'd always wanted. Of what Hannibal had offered out to him when Abigail stood there gapping at him in horror as the floor around them ran red with their blood.

Always trying to rebuild what had been taken from him, but never able to make it more real than what had existed in those fleeting moments years ago.

And now he was paying the price for all that.

Some divine retribution for his naive hope that he could have normalcy.

Ironic considering how Hannibal flouted himself in front of those same gods. Yet now the only thing he, seemingly, had left to care about was suffering the punishment of those same deities.

And he was certainly paining the price.

More nights spent curled on the bathroom floor trying desperately to breath and set himself free than not. Quietly praying to himself the Molly wouldn't come home at any moment to

find him like this. The only small amount of comfort he could find being that he could be surrounded by his dogs as he felt the Reaper's bone hands brush up and down his throat with each small gasp he took.

His life flashing before his eyes each time in a blood array of agony and screams.

Only to have it pulled away from him as suddenly he would find the piece of fungi in the toilet bowl, splattered against the tile floor, or even close enough for him to yank it would once more. His own insides dangling like Christmas ornaments off the sides. Tossing it into the tub as he leans his face into the fluff of his loyal pooches he weeps softly knowing it's just going to keep happening.

Again, and again, and again, until finally the Reapers hand's wrap around his throat instead and don't let go.

Spores left dangling above his bloated body that'll only be able to baffle the poor coroners who have the misfortune task of cutting him open.

Finally dissected for the world to see. The secrets of his life going down with him and smothering all the hopes and dreams of any over zealous psychologist that heard of him.

The only thing left for him to provide society was finally destroying Hannibal Lecter's soul with the dirt being placed above his face.

Perfectly placed above his heart as the Ripper most likely would have wanted.

But these, for now, were only nightmares plaguing his every day thoughts.

However, the real issue with this problem was that Molly and Wally were going to have to come home soon. The boy having been placed with a friend rather than with his step-father due to concerns about his mental health, and the only reason Will even stayed at the original house was to care for the dogs. Along with the comfort of being able to know that it was *his* he was gagging his guts up in. Though when the time drew near for them to return he had to take steps to avoid their eyes.

It was easy enough to make an excuse to distance himself from them.

Wally certainly was more than happy to see him go now, but Molly hesitated about him being so far away from her again. Sure the arrangement would be set up as before, but there was still so much more to worry about now. Her concerns going even beyond the threat on their lives into issues Will had mistakenly shown to her before he realized this was more than just a bad stomach ache.

His reasoning was enough though, just enough to validate both their worries and set him free.

He lost the dogs though, that wasn't going to be fun in the aftermath.

Just left to cry there on the dirty grimy tile floor and wait until he's strong enough to get to bed. Then wait and see if he could actually get some sleep.

A cycle of pain and loneliness.

Sounds like the perfect state of affairs to find himself in just as he was about to capture the "Great Red Dragon."

A plan built to lure the beast into the light, while also putting the Ripper on the line as well.

A perfect trap that if nothing more than draw the Dragon out, could lead to the death of the Ripper. Leaving loose ends finally given a somewhat satisfying ending.

Killer eating killer.

While Will on the sidelines trying to keep himself together instead of suffocating in front of two monsters that could easily put a knife in his back at any moment.

Delightful.

"Did my advice come in handy, Will?" Suddenly cuts through his thoughts making his eyes snap back to reality.

They were nearly ready for the transportation.

It was nearly time to set the trap beast that had come to plague the mortal world once more.

And he couldn't even keep his thoughts straight!

The roots of his life wrapping and wrapping around his the words the Dragon said to him the night before still lingers there too. His head bursting with too much at once and wanted him to crumple up and accept his fate. Setting himself free from this cruel world and the cruelty that he will have to face now if he were to make it out in one piece.

Longing was what caused it.

And clearing up that longing would be what stopped it.

But that would come with a price.

A side needed to be chosen, and that side was looming not too far away. Waiting for a reply to the thoughtful concern he happened to be showing to a man who had betrayed him and intended to do it again.

"Yes, it did. Your timing was more impeccable than you can ever imagine."

Nodding his head the bait looked down at the men setting him into the van that would be his transportation to his bargain with the devil.

"Well I'm glad I could be of some use, though I wish it didn't have to be this way."

"Oh I cannot agree with you more, Doctor. But now it's time for us to begin our travels."

"Of course, and here's to a safe one for us all."

Walking the transport alongside the murder he sits down calmly. Betraying the true pain he felt on the side as his throat ached and whined of how rough it really was.

There would come a time for that later though.

Now the time was for things to get started.

The capture of a Dragon was at hand.

And that was what needed to be tormenting him now.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all get a double release this week to even out when the chapters will normally start coming out now!
So for the next few weeks expect to see this get one new chapter every Friday 😄

Spittle and Tears

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Well, that hadn't gone to plan at all.

On top of an already aching stomach, now there was an aching head to worry about as Will lays limp against the hard metallic seats of the transport.

It was hard to process what exactly had happened, but it was easy enough to surmise that they'd been compromised somehow by Dolarhyde.

Of course the Dragon would be one step ahead of them somehow. He'd clearly shown that he was resourceful before, so why couldn't he find a way to make his way into their ranks and create real chaos out of their fake one.

Because Hannibal was truly free now.

Running his head along the metal in an attempt to comfort the pounding in his head, he makes out the vague shape of Hannibal exiting the vehicle. Seemingly eager to take the chance provided to him by his fan, he walks out onto the road before removing the muzzle he'd been forced into time and time again.

Finally, fully, and properly free to wreak havoc back onto the world as he saw fit.

Instead of taking this chance to flee from Will's point of view, and thereby setting himself away from possible recapture, he rather turns back around to face the prone man.

Eyes piercing down at his weak body, he looks over his pale gaunt face with a solemn understanding that this wasn't just because of the crash.

"Are you feeling alright, Will?" Rings through the cast down truck as Will opens and closes his mouth trying to get any words out.

But it was all too much.

Head aching and throbbing mixing together with usual coiling and recoiling made his body feel as though it were already dead. Waves and waves of pain rained down upon him leaving him so broken that he couldn't find the energy to try and answer the murderer in front of him.

He was nothing more than a corpse by now.

Unable to breath properly, see properly, or even feel properly, as all his senses were assaulted continuously and perpetually.

Hannibal moves closer and closer to his weak and pathetic body; it feels something slowly slide up as his guts squeeze far too close together, and he gags on something.

Beginning to choke.

Suddenly the shock of Death's return gives his body back the energy it had just been depleted of. Gasping and clawing at his throat in a desperate bid to try *anything* to set himself free of the return of this curse.

Not wanting to let his body crumple up lifeless now in front of all people, Hannibal Lecter.

And, it appeared that the cannibalistic killer shared the same sentiment as he rushed back into the truck. Pulling Will up he quickly gets into position to offer him the heimlich maneuver.

Pressing his arms against Will's body, the suffocating man moves from grasping at his own throat to grasping the other man's arms.

Taking comfort in the new found presence of another human being trying to help him in the fight against this insanity.

Tears begin to roll down his cheeks as the maneuver fails time and time again to relieve him from this foreign fungi forcing its way up where it shouldn't be able to. The edges of the world slowly darkening around him as seconds become minutes, and with each attempt Hannibal takes, there seems to be less and less of a chance for Will to come out of this experience at all.

Briefly he considers employing what Will had previous done in his attempts of removal, sticking his hand in and pull, but decides against it after enough thought. After all, sticking his hand in and yanking it out most likely would not be welcomed, even if it did end up saving his life. Boundaries were still vital in a tentative relationship like this.

So with one last go at it, putting as much umph into it as he possibly could, he pushes against Will's body. Eyes glaring down in a hopeless anticipation he holds his breath waiting for it to work.

A loud strange noise following the action before Will begins to gasp, cough, and hack. The large engorged mushroom laying not far from the two of them as he does. Little bits of saliva dripping out onto the floor as the blood begins to mix with it in a little pool

Fascinated by the grotesque display of an odd internal beauty, Hannibal sets Will back against the truck's walls. Tentatively approaching the bloody and fleshy trojan horse out of an eager hope to glean some greater understanding to set Will fear, he stops when the echos of coughs take a sharp turn into ugly sobs.

Whirling around in shock, Will presents himself as hopelessly trying to cover his face while being unable to stop himself from letting tears roll down his cheeks, spit dribbling down his chin, and snot pouring out of his nose.

Overwhelmed by just how close he'd come to death once more, but this time by the fact that if he'd had it his way then he would have ended up dying this time. Because he needed someone's help to escape death this time, and that was a realization that made his stomach churn beyond the wriggling still taking place within it.

Hannibal’s heart sinks as Will curls further and further into himself to try and hide by his frail body than continue to let this deranged serial killer continue to see him at his worst.

He shouldn't even be crying now.

He’d survived.

He’d made it out in one piece

He’d stumbled away from the Reaper's grasp one more time.

So what if that was only possible because he happened to let one person in on what was happening. That didn’t change anyth–

Will feels two arms wrap around him and a head place itself just behind his own. One side of it pressed up against his sweat laden hair while the other was pointed towards the metal seat in front of them.

With his eyes cast down and his ears filled with the sound of his hoarse, gross sobs, he doesn’t realize that just as he had turned away from Hannibal the man had been striding back over to him. Not hesitating for a moment to be by his side, if he would have him, in this moment of weakness.

Hannibal’s own eyes never daring to look down again at him, and while knowing that this gesture cannot be known due to where he was positioning himself in relation to Will, preferring instead to trust that when the other man was ready he’d let him in once more.

“The Dragon can wait for now, Will. Whenever you are prepared for the journey ahead we will make it, *together*.”

Letting his body sink into the comforting touch he doesn’t dare to speak right now. Too much of his throat was aching and screaming with each sob and breath he took. Snot still dripping down his face as he tries to sniff it away out of embarrassment.

The piece of fungi stopping him from such a minor action as it suddenly occurs to him that it was adding to his understanding of what was happening inside of him. As a new abnormality was being added to the production line it seemed, with what appeared to be vines dangled from it, possessing bits of flesh that were drenched in blood hanging off of it.

That wasn’t necessarily a new standard for these things though. What was, however, was that there was a fully bloomed flower, looking almost like a rose, sticking off to the side of it. Its striking colors mixing with the blood in such a way that it added to the striking nature of the inhuman display.

It was disgusting.

The largest abnormality that had appeared from inside of him yet, and it only furthered the creeping fear that had been growing inside of him alongside these episodes.

Next time might just be his last.

With that realization sinking in Will wordlessly grasps onto Hannibal's arms. Squeezing them he grits his teeth while tears still continue to spill down his cheeks.

Because the one thing he needed right now was someone by his side. Someone willing to help him through this and give him the support he needed in his dark time.

And if that support was going to come from one place, he was glad it happened to come from Hannibal Lecter.

Since in his time away from the serial killer he'd quickly learned, there was no one else out there that could understand his struggles and longings like him.

"We'll figure this out, Will. We'll get you through this." Hannibal whispers, trying to offer quiet comfort without disturbing the spell they'd found themselves under too much.

Only being able to offer him a nod, Will knows at that moment that if he is going to go out eventually, maybe it wouldn't be *so* bad to go out with Hannibal's watchful eye lingering over him.

Chapter End Notes

Had a Discord friend help me beta read this chapter, so any grammar improvements comes down to their lovely aid.

Get Some Rest

It took about an hour for Will to get his barring's again, but Hannibal didn't mind at all.

He'd meant it when he said he'd wait for Will to be ready.

The Dragon truly meant nothing to him now. No amount of flattery or pageantry could draw him away from Will Graham at this exact moment. When he needed someone the most.

Someone to hold him and let him sob as long as he needed. Providing a sense of safety that couldn't even be found in his own home anymore.

Running his hands delicately through his sweaty matted curls Hannibal finds himself aching to do more for Will.

Maybe if he hadn't been locked away there would have been a more affective way of addressing this? How long had this been inside fo him? Was it possible that if things had turned out differently that then maybe– *no*.

What's done is done, they were here now and freedom was at their fingertips.

That was more than he could ever long for at one point, but to be able to feel Will against his body once more. Holding him as closely as he'd always wished for. Now that was truly incredible.

More than he ever thought he would get in his life time.

It was tainted though. Wash in the internal blood of the man he found so fascinating. Only possible due to dumb luck, a longing for a seeming retribution on the part of the Red Dragon, and foolish FBI agents.

Jack, just as gullible as ever if given the right words to follow along to. Though trust certainly had to be built up with time to pull this one off, and Francis also was giving them aid. If played just right they could get away from all of this.

Disappear into the shadows of the sprawling woods all around. Given enough time or the right means they could escape from it all. Start over in another state or, better yet, another country.

Any place could work, as long as Hannibal was able to continue holding Will close through this all the horrors they would have to face.

But something deep down told him that this was beginning to be the end.

Whether it be the size, the difficulty, or the fear plastered on Will's face each little detail wove a tapestry of pain and inevitable tragedy they were hertaling towards.

Because next time– there just wasn't a guarantee. Nothing was being provided to them to give any indication that when next that piece of fungi begins to make its way up that it will even be able to come out at all. If it gets big enough then it will most likely get lodged too far down, and then there won't be any way to grab it.

No clear way to free up Will's airways.

No way, to save his life.

Pulling Will a little closer Hannibal glances down and sees that he is beginning to take deep, albeit shaky, breaths. Grounding himself in his own ways as his hands run up and down his pants. Allowing the sensation of the fabric to bring him back down and down until he's able to function again.

No more tears and fears. Just his usual coolly logical self, though still with that tinge of panic as the gorey mess of fungi is lying not far behind.

That can be set aside for now, because an invitation should be accepted when it is presented to certain guests.

"Are you feeling better, Will?" He begins, his best soothing voice on full force as he doesn't stop running his hands through the other man's hair. Just because he was returning to the now doesn't mean that he wasn't still aching from this all. To rush him now could only cause further pain, and Hannibal was quite ready for that so soon.

Fear in it's own right was beginning to creep up on him as well, after all.

"I'll be fine." He hoarsely replies, rubbing his head subconsciously against Hannibal's chest.

Tired.

He was tired.

Of course he was! He just vomited and nearly choked on a large fungi flower mix. Any normal person would have most likely passed out after that experience, but Will was still moving forward.

They still had a job to do, and he wasn't ready to let this condition entirely hold him back.

"We are going to need to get going soon. If we wish to stay out of Jack's point of view at any rate. I highly doubt he'll care for how this looks for him and Alana."

"And us?" Will dryly adds, cringing a little as he does making Hannibal squeeze down on him.

"Especially us."

Pausing for a moment he waits for Will to say anymore, but when the other man remains quiet he decides that against all of judgment he will have to take this case into his hands.

Time to finish what they both start, in their own special ways.

“Come Will, an invitation has been extended towards us. We should not ignore it now.”

Lifting Will up easily he walks towards the abandoned cop car. Already having cleared it out for use it finds it easy enough to set Will carefully down in the passenger seat. Not bother to buckle him though as he nearly instantly curls into a small ball on the seat.

He was tired.

That’s all.

In pain, and tired.

A perfectly normal combination, just with an odd twist of circumstances.

Each thought running through Hannibal’s head as he takes up the driver’s seat and lets grips the steering wheel. Running through all other safety procedures he can think of he wearily gives a glance towards the now abandoned transport truck and back to Will.

Seemingly already long asleep he lets out a tension filled sigh, before looking back towards the road and pressing the gas.

Driving forward towards both their meeting with the Dragon, but also whatever fate lay ahead for Will next.

Poor Choice of Words

As Will begins to stir he's suddenly caught off guard by the smell of– sulfur?

Blinking his eyes groggily it doesn't take long for him to realize he's no longer in Hannibal's arms, but rather curled up in a blood covered cop car seat. Jolting forward at that realization he finds a hand waiting for him. Pressing down on his shoulder in such a way that he can't help but let it lead him back down into the seat. A new wave of aches and pains suddenly crashing down on him as he does. The tedium of constantly having to throw up taking it's toll more and more on him.

Feeling Hannibal's hand then move down to his hand he's delicately pulled forward. His feet properly grinding against harsh gravel and he's hit with a gust of wind. Causing his now sleepy lulling curls to blow backwards in one big burst.

The sound of the rolling waves accompanying this sensation and Will can't help but widen his eyes in surprise.

It was quite beautiful all things considered. A rather dull gray day to arrive and see such a view, but it's grandeur still stood the tests that were being laid out for it. As, in a state of disbelief, Will stumbles forward towards the water before catching sight of the prominent cliffs edge that was now keeping him from it.

"Careful Will, the bluff is eroding." Hannibal calmly warns, though his hands dart forward out of concern for the weaker man tumbling down and meeting a terrible fate far sooner than intended. Being lured in by the beauty of the foreign hide away Hannibal knew was best for what was to come. Confrontation or death, both were better suited for here rather than anywhere else.

This had been their intended home at one point, after all.

"Hard to believe it's crumbling down when the water can't even reach it."

Smiling to himself Hannibal can't help but add to that remark, "Abigail said something quite similar when she first came here."

The crunch of gravel under heel follows after as Will stares at Hannibal in complete shock. As though he had just broken a quiet promise they'd both made to never speak of that young girl again to hear her name now of all times– stung.

It stung more than Will had ever anticipated and though he had gotten good at ignoring it, but knowing that his time was drawing to an end soon, though now he couldn't help but get choked up again over her.

One of the few people he had fought so hard for, and yet wasn't able to save.

And here Hannibal was acting sentimental about her.

He did the–

He was the one to–

Why did he feel the right to talk about her now of all times?

“I’ve hurt you, haven’t I Will? That look on your face, I didn’t expect you to get so offended by it.”

“You’re the one who took her out of this world, Hannibal. So hearing you talk about her so–”

“Easily?”

“It *hurts*.” Will makes sure to emphasis just why he was reacting this way. If Hannibal couldn't even grasp that, then there was a far deeper disconnect between them than he had first been led to believe.

Solemnly nodding his head he mutters mostly to himself, “I’ll remember that for later.” Rubbing salt in any sore wounds wouldn’t do them much good now.

They needed to be on the same relative page when it came to dealing with the Dragon, and the fungi.

No good causing tension that would only lead to unnecessary blood loss. They needed to be on the same page. Have an understanding about their goal in this, and how they will handle the challenges they were about to face.

Moving his eyes to just past Will’s head he lets out a small sigh before stating, “Let’s head inside, the sooner we can get set up here the sooner we will be prepared for our special guest.”

Offering his hand out to Will the now disgruntled man tentatively takes it, already feeling his legs were too weak to adequately get him to the house without lagging too far behind, and feels his body be supported on the uneven terrain. A strange sensation of comfort rolling over him in the process.

Finally he was getting the support he needed.

The circumstances were odd, and sometimes Will could forget that he was even getting support at all, but it was moments like this where he could learn to appreciate it again.

As the two step through the threshold of this far too fancy hideaway all Will can think of is how kind Hannibal was being, and how much of a bastard he was at the same time.

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Being placed in a spare room Hannibal informs him that he can change in here, and once finished they can reconvene in the sitting room.

“Better to be ready for our special visitor now than let him get ready before us.” His voice soothes before closing the door behind him.

Leaving Will to go through the spare closet and dress his wounds.

Medication in the bathroom cabinet came in handy, but it could only do so much when it came to the choking. However it was good enough for the after affects that always seemed to appear. Burning, aching, and stabbings pains always seemed to creep out at different points each time, but they would always come eventually.

Tossing aside his blooded work suit he brags the closets white dress shirt and downs the pills in one go. The sun setting in the background changing from the previous dull gray of the day into the cool blues and purples of dusk, until the eventual dark of the night.

Stars twinkling down on them as Will walks out onto the hard wood floor to see Hannibal waiting there for him.

A bottle of wine not too far from his grasp the cannibalistic man turns to face his now cleaned up ally, and smiles softly at him.

“You’re appearing far better now, Will. Has some of your strength returned to you?” His voice oozes out that same suave charm as when he first met him, but tinged with a sense of genuine care that Will was only now becoming acquainted with.

“I got lucky and was able to find some painkillers hiding in your medicine cabinet. At this rate I’d say that’s primarily what’s helping me keep going.” He groans a little as he stands close to Hannibal, but not too close.

Still off put by the events earlier in the day any sense of closeness he had previously felt now came off as sick and distorted as Abigail's blood kept coming to his mind.

How quickly she spilled all over the kitchen floor, how hard he’d tried to save her, and how broken he really was if he thought there was any chance of her surviving that a second time.

“Well I’m glad me leftovers came in handy then.” Beginning to pour a seemingly rather expensive wine into two glasses for them Hannibal offers one out to him with a thoughtful look in his eye. “But for now let us cherish the time we still have together before the Great Red Dragon deems it time for his grand appearance.”

Awkwardly taking the glass from Hannibal, “I doubt he’s too far behind. Probably watching us right now, if he’s smart enough.”

“Do you intend to watch rather than intervene when he arrives?” He asks, picking up his own glass now waiting for him on the table.

Pausing briefly to consider the question Will imagines the biting replies he could shoot off to show Hannibal that he put his walls back up now, but instead choosing to put it more simply. “I intend to play the part I will be allowed to play. I may be forced to watch him change you. Whether of my own volition or–”

Nodding his head in immediate understanding Hannibal cooly offers, while lifting his glass up as if in a toast, “Save yourself, kill them all?”

Unsure of what Hannibal quite meant by that he defeatedly says, “I don’t know if I can save myself.”

Whether metaphorical or physical they both knew what he meant by that.

He was going to be changed by the end of this, and there was no way around it.

Almost as if finally coming to terms with his fate now Will adds, “Maybe that’s just fine.”

Hannibal blinks at him in reply, gripping down on the bottle still in his hand, before taking a large sip from his glass. Opening his mouth to give a long thoughtful reply before a gunshot rips through the room.

Shattering the bottle the dark red liquid spills out across the hardwood floor at the cannibal’s feet. At first both men look down, trying to process what just happened, before Hannibal falls forward.

Pain tearing through his flesh now that’s had the time to grasp what just happened to him. A bullet had entered through his side and exited out into the bottle of wine. How perfect.

Will’s eyes now dart up to the fractured window to see the Dragon himself approaching out from the dark. His face looming out with a surprisingly calm disposition given the context.

Stepping back as the man begins to lift his gun and point it right at him.

And, just as it always seems to happen, at that moment Will feels a tickle at the back of his throat.

Flowering Corpse of the Lamb

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Don’t run.” Francis begins, “I’ll catch you.”

Stating it with such conviction he continues to hold the gun at Will until he takes a few more slow steps back.

His face unchanging to try and appear on an equal footing with what was happening, but deep within panic is beginning to set in as withering, curling, and lurching all take place inside of him.

Now wasn’t the time for that though. He needed to focus on the Dragon, and how Hannibal was leaning up against the piano leg gripping his side in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding.

“Hello, Francis.” He breathlessly says, almost sounding like he was laughing at one point, while his eyes focus downward rather than giving the man who shot him the grace of a glance now.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter.” Is offered back to him as Will continues to feel petrified between them.

Taking a sip of his wine in the hopes that maybe that will help with the sensation threatening to start the vicious cycle over again, or better yet force the fungus back down for long enough that he could handle this without threat of doubling over in the middle of it.

“I’m so happy you chose life, Francis.” Hannibal continues, now deciding to lift his head and stare down the man who claimed to be the Dragon. Coming off as somewhat trying to take control of the situation. Though more likely he was trying to deflect from the pain he was actually experiencing at the moment.

“Suicide is the enemy.” He nearly assures, “You were seized by a fantasy world with the brilliance and freshness and immediacy of childhood. It took you a step beyond alone.”

“I’m going to film your death, Dr. Lecter.” The man curtly replies, no longer interested in hearing this formerly powerful doctor’s hollow words. “As dying, you meld with the strength of the Dragon.”

Dryly smiling to himself Hannibal shoots back, “It’s a glorious and rather discomforting idea.” Glancing up at Will as he speaks he notes the strange expression he currently wears. Something between genuine calmness and panic he easily sees through the man’s poorly fitting mask and knows something is wrong.

Little can be done about that for now though, but it weighs heavily on Hannibal as he tries to figure out how to handle this as quickly as possible to be allow Will enough time to set himself free once more.

“Watching the film,” cuts through these thoughts and returns Hannibal’s mind to the situation he is caught in; though his eyes never weaver from watching Will with care, “will be wonderful, but not as wonderful as the act itself.”

Letting out a frustrated sigh while staring Francis straight down Hannibal carefully grabs ahold of a piece of glass. Glancing back up at Will he notices him him place his hand on his hip and appear to grab onto something, but as he begins to step away he is suddenly lunged upon.

Feeling a knife plunge right into his cheek Will’s gasps and chokes out in shock. Body shaking in place as he is held aloft for just a moment, before hands grasp around his head and he is flung through the now empty window. The cold hard rock hitting his body hard along with the striking chill of the night as he lays there for just a moment before having to drag his body upwards and prepare for the fight to come.

Feeling his body be pulled upward Will desperately reaches out to the knife now protruding from his cheek for any form of weapon at all. Something to be able to protect himself with as it becomes clear which of the two men are in control of the situation as it stands.

Yanking the knife free Will stabs it into Francis’s leg with as much energy as he can manage. The Mix of pain and still ever present tickle and now churning of his stomach leaving his body feeling weaker than he needed to be able to properly defend himself. Especially as that very knife he just stabbed back into Dolarhyde is returned back to him with it being forced down into his shoulder just as quickly as it was out of his flesh.

Watching his brutal display from the ground it doesn’t take Hannibal long before he gets his strength back and rushes to Will’s side. Lunging onto Dolarhyde to try and get him away from the other man he instead finds himself being flung to the rocks. His back hitting them with a loud thud followed by an aching in his back. Dolarhyde advancing promptly without even the slightest bit of hesitation.

Still on the ground Will watches as Dolarhyde grabs a hold of Hannibal and begins to choke him. He in turn tries doing the same, though the man begins to hold him aloft making the pursuit of retaliation more a mere show of anger than anything fruitful.

Will is still there though. Laying there bleeding out on the stone with a knife in his shoulder he grits his teeth once more and yanks the weapon free from his shoulder. Beginning to stand up, though his body feels weak and frail from all the abuse it’s suffered in the corse of a single day, under the pale moonlight the blood adorning his body shines black, as though he had been ordained by some ancient deity, he feels his body building itself up to kill him itself. To release one last piece of damned fungi set on finally choking the life out of him. It doesn’t matter right now though. All that matters to putting down the Red Dragon once and for all, and doing it all the while with Hannibal’s help.

Rushing forward as fast as he can he stabs the knife deep into Dolarhyde’s back twice, clearly doing damage as the man recoils, but near instantly being met with a slap to the face for his efforts. Retaliation is immediate though as the so called Dragon immediately kicks Hannibal in the chest, launching the man backwards into a pill of wood as he then turns around to face Will.

This would be his undoing as Hannibal grabs hold of a loose ax laying amongst the stack and cuts it across the man's leg. The facsimile of a dragon cries out in pain but neither of the men care enough to give it a second thought.

They had the upper hand now.

Will's once more swiftly forces himself forward stabbing down into Dolarhyde's leg as Hannibal does the same. Slamming the ax hard against the man's vulnerable flesh the man's blood immediately responding to the attack by pouring it's contents all around the two attackers.

The Dragon stumbles to the ground in pain, allowing the briefest moment of eye contact between the now partners in crime. A quick understanding being shared by the both of them that this was it. They were going to finish the job. One way or another, the Great Red Dragon would fall by their hands.

Bloodied and beaten down the two forget all other worries as Hannibal latches himself onto the Dragon's back while Will charges at him from the front. Hannibal's arm warps itself tight around the man's neck while Will's knife plunges itself deep into his stomach. Tearing through the flesh as though it were thin paper Hannibal quickly takes a bite out of the man's throat before falling back onto the ground.

The two standing back from the blood tapestry they just created as the former Dragon falls to his knees. Spraying blood from the tear in this throat and laceration of of stomach, it pools all around him while his body goes limp. Eyes glazing over nearly instantly while the reach of his tainted red muck runs further and further through the stone.

Now removed from his once powerful position Will and Hannibal stand there victorious, together.

Both of them having played a part in this powerful death.

Will remains on the ground, his body shaking from all the lost blood, while he looks around at the portrait they've just created.

Dolarhyde's wings finally appearing as his body builds itself a new with his own blood.

How apt that only in death the man could finally be brought together with his beloved dragon.

While adrenaline rushes through his veins it's affects begin to wear off. The aches and pains of what just happened to his body become more and more pronounced as time wears on.

While that was to be expected, and Will found himself resigning to acceptance that it would be a long time before he stopped hurting in any way, it suddenly occurs to him that the retching and coiling in his stomach is just as prominent.

He gasps out in horror, drawing Hannibal's quick eye to him as he too was caught up in admiring their work, as his eyes widen with a visceral understanding that this was about to be

his end.

After everything they'd just down, this was how he was going to end up.

Lying down on the bloodied stone with a blooming mushroom in his mouth waiting to be found next to Dolarhyde of all people.

He could already imagine the TattleCrime headlines now.

Freddie spinning some inanine yarn about how Hannibal handled two birds with one stone. How the Dragon and Will Graham had been working together the whole time, and for that the Chesepeake Ripper saw it fit to kill them both. Each scenario sounding more and more outlandish, but the people will believe even the most crazy of things if they want to.

As these thoughts begin to over take him he grasps both his hands around his throat as he feels it begin to gag. A large lump squirming it's way upwards all the way as his insides scream at him to do something. To get those foreign invader out and set himself free once more. It's the largest he's felt so far though, and last time he wasn't even able to get the object out without help.

Hannibal's there, already rushing over to Will despite his own injures, but even with his aid before it was too much of a task to remove the invader. Would his previous methods even be able to work this time? Or would he just be left sitting there clinging to Will's corpse as the world slowly fades away from him. The ever present void of death finally consuming him entirely while Hannibal meekly cries out his name and realizes all they just fought for was for nothing.

With each of these realizations setting in he quietly makes peace with the world.

Hannibal falling down behind him and locking his arms around his waist, just like before, while saying something to him that he just can't catch.

Maybe a plea to stay with him?

To hold out just a little bit longer?

That they'll make it through this?

It doesn't matter anymore, he can't make it out over the sounds of his throat tightening around the fungus and his desperate bids to get even the slightest bit of air through. Gasp after gasp with the same outcome, nothing.

Just gargling blood and pathetic watering eyes. That was what he had been reduced down to after such a triumphant moment. Finally allowing himself to indulge in that oh so bloody embrace that Hannibal seemingly always wanted from him, and he couldn't even finish it without falling into pieces.

Looking back at Hannibal he notices just how vulnerable he looks right now. Panic etched into his brow it's startling to see him to afraid for once in his life. Such a power creature for so long, now brought down to Will's level by the betrayal of another's body.

It was strangely sweet to see.

Fear turning his once powerful body used to maim human beings into a tool to try and save at least one human being. The singular one of millions that Hannibal actually decided to give a damn about.

It's so beautifully cruel in such an ironic way that Will can't help but smile a little to himself. As despite everything he finds himself time and time again being endeared towards this serial killer.

Even though he'd taken so much from him- his safety, the lives of those he cared about, and even his own freedom- he still finds himself brought to his knees under this monster's spell.

Molly had mundanity on her side, promising sweet peace to Will on nights where the world felt like too much, but he'd tasted the power that came with Hannibal's way of life, and he'd never really been ready to let go of that.

He couldn't lie to himself anymore, not now when he was so close to slipping away.

"Hannibal," He roughly chokes out, barely having the air to even say the words , "I *love* you."

Chapter End Notes

> Wrath of the Lamb is just too good to completely mess with, beyond the obvious, so I hope I was able to convey the original scene well enough 😅

Flowers in Bloom

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rough words hang in the air with Hannibal unsure how to react to what he'd just heard. His focus had been entirely on keeping Will alive at the moment, but suddenly hearing what he'd been wondering for years now is too much to not even catch him off guard.

Letting his arms go slack against Will's body he feels something wet run down his cheeks as it settles deep inside of him why he was hearing this now.

Will thought he was going to die.

He understood something that Hannibal wasn't able to, and that something pertained to whether or not his body was going to be able to come out of this in one piece. For which he'd determined it wasn't likely and decided it was best to say his goodbyes now.

"Don't be like that now, Will." Hannibal half states half pleads, "There's still time to fix this."

Squeezing Will's weak body tighter he continues his focus on trying to dislodge the foreign object from his esophagus. Tears beginning to well up in his own eyes. It was an odd sensation. He hadn't cried in a very long time, at least since the death of his sister, and yet he found himself overwhelmed here.

Logic no longer existed in a world where what once was left behind when the modern age came into being could suddenly reappear. No clear answers for it's occurrence beyond old writing and inane whisperings along the lines of divine punishment.

Something like this could easily be explained from retrospect as some sort of story about a disease that had once plagued a certain people. A clear line being drawn between the suffering and the naïve belief that that would be the cause behind it. That was from a retrospective point of view though, not down and dirty experiencing it in real time with the suffering and death of those you care about in real time. It was meant to be the sort of thing teenagers and college students were meant to break down the symbolism behind in class, not have actually happen to someone now a days. Especially not them.

He may have spoken about god, or gods as it now seemed, but he didn't expect anything to come of it. He didn't expect he former seeming folly to return in any way shape or form to him beyond a possible arrest that would leave him locked away for awhile. He never even would have considered the idea of divine retribution to still be in the cultural lexicon beyond the inane rambling of religious zealots looking for a quick buck, and yet here he was seeing the fruit of what that seeming retribution would bring if someone would dare to defy those that held dominion over the human race. At least, that's how he was choosing to explain this now. With more time maybe he could come up with something better, but it was to be determined if he would have that time at all.

The light in Will's eyes is fading faster and faster the more time he seemingly wastes trying to do the logical thing. Something that was clear and tangible, that he could do to try and alleviate the strain on Will's body, and yet it wasn't doing that at all. Instead it seemed that Will's conditioned preferred to force him to the side. Making him more of an observer than a participant.

But he needed to do something! Just sitting by and watching it happen would be far worse than trying desperately to cling onto something even if it was already beginning to slip away. It may be a painful thing to do, but in the end it would be better to be left knowing that he tried instead of standing ideally by.

And yet–

Will's eyes dilate a little, as if he were laying his eyes upon something for the first time, with a small pained smile breaking out across his face despite himself. Reaching out Hannibal is startled by his hand brushing against his cheek. An almost reassuring motion falling flat with the cruelty of what was playing out before him.

Each gasp living Will's lips becoming shallower and shallower with his skin growing colder as well. Where once a stag may have loomed over him in moments like this, now the specter of death was once more by his side. Standing just behind Hannibal they wait for Will with open arms. Beckoning out for the tortured man to join them on the other side, and then all can finally be at peace.

A sick offer, yet a tempting one still. As the world continues into this darken spiral he seemed to find it in his memories begin to cross his eyes. It was the sort of cliche he hadn't expected from his final moments, but it only served to add weight to the idea of giving in.

He hadn't led an easy or even good life. Constantly being poked and prodded at by those that wished to only use him. And when he thought he finally found his place, instead he found people who only further wished to exploit him. It just so happened that they were better at hiding that fact behind thine veiled lies of justice and saving lives.

Then there was Hannibal.

In all his twisted cruel absurdity the man who seemingly cared about him above all else had also made his life a living nightmare. Even if he grew guilty about it later that didn't change the fact that he was stuck in Chilton's institution on the possible threat of being prosecuted for crimes he never committed if the Ripper hadn't had a moment of clarity.

So much blood had stained his hands over these last few years, with various degrees of physical and psychological damage done to him, that the idea of finally bidding adieu to this cruel world almost made sense.

Almost.

There was still one loose end that he was hoping to tie up before he had to give that final goodbye. He just had to know it was true. That even this cruel man had learned to love someone after all these years.

Hannibal finally stops his last ditch effort. It clearly wasn't work, if anything it may have been causing him more pain that he otherwise may be in. No, instead he grabs ahold of Will's hand he feels tears spill down his cheeks as he tilts his head and kisses his palm.

If this was going to be it then he might as well conquer his sentiment.

"I love you too, Will." His lip quivering a little bit as he briefly considers imploring a pet name he'd once thought up for the man dying in his arms now. It wasn't the time nor the place for that now though.

This line of thought changes though, instead leading the Chesapeake Ripper to lean his head downward to meet Will's. Delicately placing a kiss on his blood splattered lips he feels the taste of iron swirl amongst his mouth, unable to determine whether or not it was from his injures or the smattering of blood speck that had been coming out of Will's throat with gagging breath he took.

It was such a liberating sensation for the both of them that even with the grim context for a moment they both are able to forget all their woes. Whether they lived or died was no longer an issue. They had each other, and that's what mattered.

That's all that would *ever* matter.

With the moonlight glinting down on them through the clouds there is a beat where both of them wait for something to happen. Whether it be Will going limp or the cops pulling up, either option seemed likely now with their luck. However, instead there was a strange sensation rolling through both of their mouths. As if something were clogging both their throats simultaneously they both pull away startled.

Will fumbles down next to Hannibal and they both lean on the stone and immediately begin spitting up flower petals. Vivid pinks and reds mixing with violet hues and soft blues until the the bluff is largely covered with a multicolored mix of petals. It takes both of them a good few minutes before both of them to get it all out of their systems. Once finished however, they awkwardly glance at each other in befuddlement.

That wasn't supposed to happen.

Had the fungi come out when they were kissing? If that was the case though then one of them would have coughed it up in the process, right?

Then, feeling air come in and out cleanly Will runs a hand over his throat and his eyes widen with realization. "It's gone." It comes out slow and a little horse, but it comes out. The words sitting there with the quiet implicit power that they hold. A mix of wonder and relief washes over both of them as it dawns on them that they made it.

"How?"

Wracking his brain trying to find a halfway decent answer his stomach promptly drops, though this time without the sensation of something wriggling through his insides, as a

recollection of what he read online hits him in the face. “Unrequited love, that’s what it goes back to.”

That hits them both like a tone of bricks. Will had said as much back at the institution, but neither of them were quite sure how to take it. Or more accurately, Hannibal knew how to take it. It just didn’t seem to make any sense with what Will had presented to him. If anything he was the one who should have been afflicted by such a thing, though if was so latent within Will then perhaps nothing else could have driven him to confess such a thing.

“Were you so oblivious you could not have figured that out on your own, Will?” Hannibal coily asks, nearly coming off as snide there’s a sense of triumph in his voice that Will feels is unearned. If he had figured it out then this could have been over a lot sooner. Then again, it did seem like he had to be the one to put the pieces together.

Frustration seeping in now Will retorts, “I was married– am married to Molly, I didn’t understand how that could be true while still pining for something that I couldn’t clearly see.”

There was a beat of silence as the two sort of just sat there not quite sure what to say to that.

Hesitating for a moment Hannibal looks around them. The blood and the petals mixing together now to make a grotesque display of this strange mess they’d gotten themselves into. “Well things have certainly become more clear since then.”

“They certainly have.” Will sighs, beginning to to stand up he notes how adrenaline was still pumping through his veins. Already imagine what all this was going to feel like in a few hours he offers his hand out to Hannibal.

Even if he was about to be in a whole other world of pain soon enough for now he could do this. He could hold his hand out to this serial killer that had captured his heart in spite of himself and prepare for the coming changes they would have to accept now. They hadn’t crossed to barriers for nothing, after all. They were going to figure what comes next now, together.

Looking Will over Hannibal waits and asks, “Where will we go?”

“Anywhere, we’ll figure it out as we go if we have to. As long as we’re together.”

Softly smiling Hannibal wipes now dried tears from his cheek and eagerly takes Will’s hand. Standing next to the other man he nods his head, “Then let’s go.”

Placing one arm under Will’s and looking towards the now sprawling driveway they begin to walk.

It’s slow going, but with enough time they know they’ll make their way out of there. No matter the difficulties ahead, they’ll find a way forward.

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A delicate hand runs across Will’s face as Hannibal feels his scars ever so tentatively.

It’d nearly been a year now since everything, and what all exactly happened that night at the bluff was a particular sore spot in the after math of running away.

Talking about what they did to Dolarhyde itself was a nonissue. Something they could easily joke about and discuss at leisure whenever they were relaxing, or even celebrating. Though there was little time to break down the other part of that night since the moment they got off that driveway was when shit started to get more real.

Jack quickly became an issue they would have to always take into consideration, and after enough arguing and pleading on Will’s part Hannibal had conceded to leave Alana and Margot be. Maybe someday he’d be allowed to get his dues, but now was not that.

Instead he and Will carefully planned their movements to allow themselves to get farther and farther away from Jack, and then they could get out of the country.

Cuba was decided to be the easiest one to get to. No airplanes meant a less obvious ticket trail for someone to pick up on, and a seemingly relatively easy place to slip into. Things could be fudged there later if they felt like it but there was still talk about them going to Europe someday. That was to be determined though.

A few things placed here and there, and their off. Far away from Jack’s wandering eye with enough distance to ensure that no ties could be traced back to them. Just what they needed to drop off the face of the earth, with the possibility of a few minor kills spread out over a few months or years.

This was as close to perfect for them as they could afford.

Still, there were things left lingering.

“Do you think they will ever fade?” Will thoughtlessly asks, thumbing his way through a pulp novel they’d picked up that day he’d found it a good way to wind down before bed. There were points where his body would just be too tense without how many things they were gambling on at once that he would find himself stuck awake until dawn came crashing in on them. But, reading seemed to lead him down until his body was ready to accept sleep once more.

“It was too deep to ever fade within our life time. I’d say it’ll last as long as you do.”

“How nice.” He sarcastically states, quietly rolling his eyes while holding back a smile all the while. It was just enough of a twistedly sweet answer for him that he wasn’t even surprised at the elusion to death that was so easily dropped in there.

“I hope they never do.” The Ripper adds, leaning his head down on Will’s shoulder he scans over the page he was at but finds nothing to catch his interest at the moment.

“Even the ones you gave me?” He asks despite already knowing the answer. Those always seemed to be his favorite to feel. As if he didn’t feel it under his finger then it would suddenly disappear.

“It allows me to always be by your side, even if we are separated.”

Rolling his eyes Will sets his book aside and looks down at the man now cuddling up against his side. “You think they’ll ever get the chance to separate us now?”

Moving his hand down to he lets it rest, for the time being on Will’s chest. “If death ever returns to your side then perhaps, but I do believe they would prefer to take us alive. We are far more valuable together now than apart.”

Will pauses as he considers the more obvious reference to death now. “Nothing like that is going to happen again, not now at least.”

The solemnness in his voice catches Hannibal off guard at first, but quickly makes sense with just exactly what he was referring to. The flowering fungi had nearly taken him away from him at the pinnacle of their burgeoning connection, and subsequently to ensure it would never happen again Will had thrown himself into heavy research. All he was able to come up with was more or less the same as before, but it did serve to support that it was never going to happen again.

He’d confessed, and they’d both accepted. Meaning that they were both immune now to whatever spell had been placed on them.

It still left a few lingering questions about what divine entity exactly had cast it’s eye upon them and decided to play a game, but for now that too could be brushed aside.

Maybe someday they would be able to understand it all, the whos, whats, and whys of the situation, but as it now stands it served more a sore spot for Will then anything.

He was too blind to the reality of his mixed feels for the cannibalistic murder to have it occur to him until he was nearly in Death’s arms to confess his true feelings, and that frustrated him deeply.

Especially because of Molly. He felt like he had betrayed her somehow. She was a kind woman who clearly deserved better than him as a husband, and he didn’t even want her!

A few times he’d tried to see what had become of her in the wake up his and Hannibal's disappearances, but now he’d simply begun wearing his wedding band around his neck on a chain. A solemn reminder of the mistakes he’d made up to that point, and a continued promise to never make them again.

“I never said it would.”

“You didn’t need to.” He tentatively places his hand on the ring now, his eyes darting away from Hannibal, clinging to it a little he mutters out, “I know what you’re thinking, and we aren’t going to be separated again. Not like before. If they even try that we’ll give them hell.”

Hannibal smiles softly at the taught determination clear on his face. It was sweet just how convicted he’d become on this point, and though it may not have been realistic it was still extremely endearing for him to have given it so much thought.

Moving his hand up to tilt Will's chin down he forces the other man to look at him once more as he says, "We will, mon amor. I promise I will always fight for you. No matter what we may face, I will fight for you."

His smooth voice oozes out and makes Will melt against him. Leaning down on him more and more until his body has slid right down next to Hannibal. "That's a very big promise, are you sure you'll be able to keep it?"

Quickly stealing a kiss Hannibal leans his forehead against Will and gives him his most assuring smile. "Of course, no more flowers or fungi are going to keep me away from you now, Will. And if Jack ever tries to come between us again then there will certainly be hell to pay."

Will smiles back at Hannibal and pulls himself closer to him by locking his arm around his neck. Pulling their bodies so close that the metal of his ring grinds against their flesh, but neither are particularly bothered by it.

A simple "Perfect." was the most he could offer as a reply as they both decide to let the conversation taper off from there. Choosing instead to focus on cuddly with the other the slip into sleep easily with the knowledge that the other was nearby.

It may not be eternally guaranteed to be, but for as long as they would have the other they would be there.

Despite the trials they had to faced to get there they could finally set them aside and look to the future was an assured excitement.

The world was their oyster now, after all. And no amount of flower or fungi was going to change that fact now.

Chapter End Notes

> It feels strange to finally bid adieu to this series. Originally I'd written the first chapter on paper back in January and to finally finish it in June, how apt, feels kinda surreal. I hope y'all had a good time with this one! The support I received on it means a lot to me, so thank y'all so much for everything! 💜

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